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IRON MAIDEN

POWERSLAVE AT 40

AND THE GREATEST ALBUMS OF 1984

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ROCK

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BIG COUNTRY
FRANKIE MILLER
BLACKBERRY
SMOKE
& More!



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Ace Frehley

The former Kiss guitarist on his old bandmates, early life, being sober and getting fit, and his latest solo album.

Interview: Dave Karger

"Heeey!" says Ace Frehley, by way of introduction. "The Ace is here!" Behind him on the Zoom screen, the room he's sitting in is illuminated by purple, blue, red and white lights. "Where am I? I'm on a spaceship," he says with a cackle. "Nah, I'm in my studio. Looks cool, right?"

The irrepressible former Kiss guitarist is on top form, and rightly so. His sizzling new album *10,000 Volts* keeps up the late-career hot streak that began with 2009's *Anomaly* and continued through 2014's *Space Invader* and 2018's *Spaceman*, as well as the two-volume *Origins* covers albums.

We're talking a couple of weeks after his former band played their last ever show, at Madison Square Garden. "I really don't think that much about Kiss any more," he insists, although it becomes evident that this isn't strictly true. Still, if anyone embodies that band's original rock'n'roll spirit, it's the Space Ace.

How are you, Ace?

Better than most days [laughs]. Wait, I have some cough drops in my mouth, I need to get rid of them [leans over and disposes of them].

Your new album is called *10,000 Volts*. It's got songs called *Walkin' On The Moon*, *Cosmic Heart* and *Blinded*, which is about being 'blinded by science'. Where does your interest in science and space come from?

My father was an electrical engineer. He designed some of the transformers that are in the rover that's on the Moon. So my dad's transformers are on the Moon as we speak. He bought me my first guitar—a cheap, twenty-five-dollar Japanese guitar. Once I hit the E-chord with the volume all the way up on the amp, it was love at first sight, or first hearing or whatever you want to call it.

On this record you worked with Steve Brown, formerly of the hard rock band Trixter. Where did you meet him?

My fiancée hooked me up with him. She said: "You gotta work with Steve." He came up with this song, and one of the lines was: "Walking on the Moon." I said: "Steve, come over to my house, rewrite the song and make 'Walking on the Moon' the chorus." And we came up with the song *Walking On The Moon*. Once we finished that we just kept churning 'em out.

You've put out five albums in the past ten years alone. Most people are slowing down at this point in their career. You're speeding up. Why?

I love to write songs, I love to record. My fiancée's got me on a strict diet of organic foods. She's got me working out, lifting weights and doing push-ups. I'm down to a hundred and seventy-five pounds; I've lost about forty pounds. I've never felt better in my life.

All your recent solo albums have been great. It doesn't sound like you're coasting. What's the secret?

There is no secret. I don't have any master plan. I'm just being me. Well, one of the secrets is that I haven't changed the formula with the

way I record. I've always recorded with one or two other people in the room. What's that old saying? Too many chefs in the kitchen spoils the... stew? [laughs] Something like that.

A few months ago you said: "My new album is going to make Paul Stanley look like an imbecile." That sounds like fighting talk.

Well, in the last few months he put me down pretty badly. He even made a statement on *The Howard Stern Show* that if me and Peter [Crisa, original Kiss drummer] got up on stage with them at Madison Square Garden, you might as well call the band Piss instead of Kiss. That got to me. We ended up having some words. But I'm really done with the tit-for-tat. They've supposedly done their last show at the Madison Square Garden. I heard some crazy rumour that they're coming out of retirement again. I hope not.

If anyone in Kiss had a punk edge, it was you. Is that fair to say?

Way before punk, I was hanging out at the corner candy store and I ended up joining a gang called the Ducky Boys. I was always a streetwise kid. I'd been arrested probably half-a-dozen times before I was in Kiss. I learned the hard way, but I think it's helped me in life to be a survivor. A lot of people don't have street smarts. You gotta have street smarts to survive.

What do you miss about the New York you grew up in?

It was interesting. My family lived in a one-bedroom apartment. Me and my brother slept in bunk beds in my parents' master bedroom, and my sister slept on the couch in the living room. Then we moved to the other side of the building, and that had two bedrooms. Eventually I started playing in bands and making money, and I moved up to Westchester, to a beautiful building on the Hudson River. At that point everything just started going up and up. Kiss started taking off. There was a lot of partying. I'm a recovering alcoholic and a recovering drug addict, and have been [sober] for seventeen years.

Congratulations.

Thank you. Since I stopped, it changed my life. It wasn't easy to stop, but I had a lot of help from friends and people in Alcoholics Anonymous. In fact I still have the same sponsor as I did when I first joined A.A. I spoke to him this morning. We were talking about [US politician] Bobby Kennedy Jr. Bobby Kennedy and me are very good friends. I've been to his house a dozen times. If he's gonna do a rally and he needs a rock band, I'd be more than happy to perform.

Bobby Kennedy Jr is a pretty outspoken and controversial figure, especially when it comes to anti-vaccine stuff.

Yeah, but we're dear friends. I'd do anything for Bobby. I'm just worried that he's gonna get caught between the Democrats and Republicans, because he's running as an independent.

You've dabbled in acting over the years, from *Kiss Meets The*

➤



"I'd been arrested half-a-dozen times before I was in Kiss. I learned the hard way."



No kidding: Ace and his band.

Here's one I made earlier: Ace knocks out another smart tune.

Phantom Of The Park in 1978 to the 2005 crime thriller *Remedy*. Have you had many acting offers over the years?

A couple, but I turned them down. There's a scene in *Remedy* where me and the star of the movie are shooting up heroin. I'm a method actor—I didn't shoot heroin, but I took a handful of pain pills and I was completely loaded. The scene was very realistic, put it like that.

Who would you like to have play you in the movie of your life?

If there was gonna be an Ace Frehley movie, my first choice would be the kid that plays *The Flash* [Ezra Miller]. Can you imagine him with my hair? His eyes are very similar to mine. He's crazy as well.

As well as the release of *10,000 Volts*, February 2024 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the first Kiss album. Are you going to celebrate that?

What's to celebrate? They have two impostors on stage with them. Six or seven months ago they were inviting me and Peter to play at Madison Square Garden, and in the last month [before the show] they started trashing us. I don't know if I'll ever get on stage with them, and I personally don't care. I'm very happy with the band I have now, I'm very happy with the new record, just moving forward.

When was the last time you spoke to Gene or Paul?

The last time I spoke to Paul was a couple of months ago. I was very pissed off at what he said about calling the group Piss. Come on, I've been making albums and touring for years, I could get up and play two or three Kiss songs flawlessly. But for some reason he insulted me. And I called him out on it. I said: "I demand an apology." He called me up and said: "Fuck you, Ace, I'm not giving you an apology" and hung up. Prior to that, me and Paul would talk on the phone three or four times a year.

What about Gene?

The last time I sent Gene an email was when he had to stop the show in South America [in April 2023] because he was dehydrated, and I was concerned about his welfare. I said: "I hope you're okay, Gene," ba-da-bing, ba-da-boom. He got back to me in five minutes. He said: "I'm okay, Ace. Thanks for caring." I'm closest with Gene.

last twenty years.

Do you think about a time when you will retire?

I don't give it any thought at all. I'm just gonna go till the wheels fall off. Even if I end up in a wheelchair, I can still write songs.

Will we ever see an Ace Frehley avatar?

No. Never in a million years. That is not what I'm all about. I'm about amps, guitars, singing. If I can't sing any more I'd hire a lead singer, no big deal. But my voice is stronger than it has been in a long time.

Where do you stand on bands using backing tapes at shows?

I myself wouldn't use them. When people come to see me, they deserve a live show. The groups that use backing tapes, I guess they use them because they can't cut it any more. I'm not gonna name names, but you know who I'm referring to [laughs].

If you could go back and change anything about your life, what would it be?

Nothing.

Honestly?

Yeah. My book [Ace's 2011 autobiography] was titled *No Regrets*. I made a lot of mistakes in my life. But my [AA] sponsor told me: "You had to make those mistakes to get to where you are today." If you look

at those old Kiss shows, I have a buzz on, but I'm still playing great. Even on the reunion tour [in the late 90s] I was still getting high, but I would save the crazy stuff for after the show. Now I don't need anything to perform. I enjoy performing sober.

How many more albums have you got in you?

As long as I can sing and write and play guitar, the sky's the limit. I could have two more albums in me. I could have five more albums in me. As long as it's fun, I'll keep doing it.

And is it fun?

It's more fun than it's been in a long time. ☺

10,000 Volts is out on February 23 via *MNRK Records*.

ACE FREHLEY

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